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# PROGRAM DESIGN: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CREATING EL PROGRAMS WITH A FOCUS ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Brigitta Bognar Cronin

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PROGRAM DESIGN: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CREATING EL PROGRAMS  
WITH A FOCUS ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by

Brigitta Bognar Cronin

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language.

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>CHAPTER ONE</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>   | <b>5</b>  |
| Introduction  | 5         |
| Challenges in English Learner Education                     | 5         |
| Personal Experience as an Educator                          | 7         |
| Understanding the Factors Influencing Behavior and Learning | 9         |
| Research Motives  | 11        |
| Chapter Summary   | 12        |
| <b>CHAPTER TWO</b>  | <b>13</b> |
| <b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>                                    | <b>13</b> |
| Introduction  | 13        |
| Social-Emotional Learning                                   | 16        |
| Social-Emotional Development in Adolescents                 | 16        |
| A Second Window of Opportunity                              | 17        |
| Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs                    | 18        |
| Grounding Research  | 18        |
| Effective SEL Programs for Adolescents                      | 20        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
|   | 3         |
| Integrating Social-Emotional Learning into the Curriculum | 21        |
| Summary   | 25        |
| Identity and Investment in Second Language Learning       | 25        |
| Research prior to 1980                                    | 26        |
| Imagined Communities                                      | 26        |
| Grounding Research  | 28        |
| Implications  | 31        |
| Summary   | 31        |
| Culturally Responsive Pedagogy                            | 32        |
| Historical Overview                                       | 32        |
| The Importance of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy          | 33        |
| Culturally Relevant Texts                                 | 35        |
| Summary   | 38        |
| Chapter Summary   | 38        |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE</b>                                      | <b>39</b> |
| <b>PROJECT DESCRIPTION</b>                                | <b>39</b> |
| Introduction  | 39        |
| Project Overview  | 40        |
| Rationale   | 40        |
| Project Framework   | 41        |

|                                  |           |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
|                                  | 4         |
| Content Quality                  | 41        |
| Design Quality                   | 42        |
| Organization Quality             | 43        |
| User-Friendly Criteria           | 43        |
| Audience                         | 44        |
| Project Timeline                 | 44        |
| Project Platform                 | 44        |
| Assessment                       | 45        |
| Summary                          | 45        |
| <b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>              | <b>46</b> |
| <b>CONCLUSION</b>                | <b>46</b> |
| Introduction                     | 46        |
| My Takeaways                     | 46        |
| Literature Review                | 47        |
| Project Development              | 48        |
| Major Learnings                  | 49        |
| Research Skills                  | 49        |
| Creating Research-Based Projects | 49        |
| Benefits to Profession           | 50        |
| Implications                     | 50        |

|                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
|                   | 5         |
| Limitations       | 52        |
| Conclusion        | 53        |
| <b>REFERENCES</b> | <b>54</b> |

“I felt rather out of place when I came to the U.S. and all that propaganda against the country I still had connections with made me feel rather mad. I felt like retaliating for something when I was writing it.

It [the war] changed my life upside down, and instead of being an average student in Croatia who had everything going for him, I ended up in the United States having to pay for my own education.”

- Sergej, an *English Learner* (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008)

“I have become literate in life and grew up much faster due to one of the sharpest turns my life has ever made—my immigration to America from Russia. Not only did this experience taught me the language and culture of a completely different society but it also gave me a dyadic personality of which I am very proud . . . I have become an entirely different person.”

- Misha, an *English Learner* (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008)

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

This chapter introduces some of the challenges that English Learners (ELs) in the United States face. For instance, moving to a new country, acquiring a new language, and learning to mitigate a new country's system and customs can be challenging for immigrants. Some of the English Learners in K-12 public schools are also expected to alleviate the financial and cultural barriers for their families by working after school or by looking after their younger siblings. Additionally, a large number of the EL population are refugees who had previously experienced trauma such as the death of a loved one and harsh living conditions. As a result, ELs are likely to experience more stress, hardship, and challenges than their US-born English-speaking peers. I am researching how these challenges affect ELs' academic and behavioral outcomes and what educators can do to support these students' social-emotional well-being. My research question is: *How can EL teachers design a program that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs?* Based on my findings, I will create a framework that aids EL teachers in integrating social-emotional learning into the curriculum specially designed for the unique needs of the EL population.

#### **Challenges in English Learner Education**

The number of English Learners attending US public schools is on the rise. According to the US Department of Education (2015), 4.8 million children were classified as English Learners (ELs) in the 2014-2015 academic year. The number of English Learners increased by 53.2



percent between the school year of 1997-98 and 2007-2008 (Batalova & McHugh, 2010).

English Learners (ELs) require instruction in English language, and at the same time they are also required to attend to content knowledge such as math and science in a language that is not fully comprehensible to them.

Moreover, a large number of K-12 students are classified as Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). The Minnesota Department of Education defines SLIFE as students (1) whose first language is other than English, (2) enters school in the US after 6<sup>th</sup> grade, (3) has at least two years less schooling than their English-speaking peers and (4) are at least two years below grade level and (5) may be preliterate in their home language (2018 Minnesota Statutes, 124D.59 DEFINITIONS § Subd. 2a.English Learners; interrupted formal education). Educating SLIFE students poses a unique challenge to school districts since these students may be preliterate both in their first language and in English. Thus, SLIFE students require additional instruction to support their literacy development. They are also expected to learn English as a Second Language and absorb specific content in English often within the same amount of classroom hours as their literate English-speaking peers.

Both educators and administrators are challenged to meet state-mandated requirements that are often unrealistic. For example, ELs are mandated to take the same standardized tests as their English-speaking peers after attending only two years of public school in Minnesota. However, it takes 5-7 years for ELs to fully acquire the language of academics (Dresser, 2012). In addition, the lack of financial resources makes it difficult to fund the programs that ELs and SLIFE students often need. As a result, the need to teach content to ELs often takes precedence over social-emotional learning.

Programs designed for ELs often address the importance of teaching content and language simultaneously. However, classroom management often poses a problem even to a seasoned teacher since students are often coaxed to change their behaviors by using positive or negative reinforcement only. Although positive and negative reinforcement may eliminate the problem temporarily, it is usually not a permanent solution. Instead, EL teachers can aim to intrinsically motivate students by modifying the curriculum and instruction to best serve the social-emotional needs of ELs.

### **Personal Experience as an Educator**

I started working for a charter school in 2017 that predominantly served newly-arrived Somali immigrants in grades 5-12. I anticipated that there might be behavioral problems that I inevitably would face as a new teacher; however, I was not prepared for the severity of it. As I quickly learned, fights regularly broke out in the cafeteria and the hallways. Students were often suspended and/or expelled as a result. Our jobs as educators were more than just teaching students to the state-mandated standards, but it was essential to protect students from harming themselves and others. Seeing these young students struggle to control their impulses and frustrations was really disheartening and I was eager to discover the reason behind their aggression.

As an educator, I felt compelled to address the emotional needs of ELs in my classroom. As a first step, I started inquiring about the reason for students' aggression. I found out that the majority of students experienced severe trauma prior to moving to the United States. For example, one of the students in my class lost her mother due to the lack of available medical care in Somalia. Another student, who was also in the special education program, suffered a brain

injury during the war in Somalia. Another student of mine along with her mother and younger siblings were reunited with their father in Minnesota after 10 years of separation. Each time I conversed with a student, I learned about a sort of hardship that was almost inconceivable to me.

The hardship that ELs endured prior to moving to the United States does not curtain when they and their families leave their country behind. When ELs settle in the United States, they may experience a culture shock. Culture shock is “a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary). Newly arrived immigrants may struggle to decipher the customs and the culture of the United States, thus they may need assistance with a variety of tasks at first.

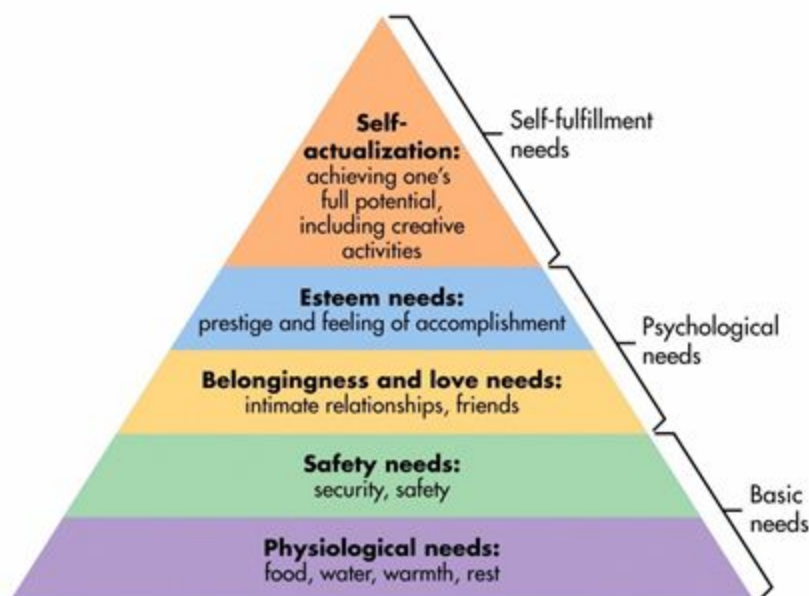
As an educator, I experienced the pressure to raise the test scores on standardized tests for ELs. Administrators sought to implement a new curriculum, tied final grades to standardized test scores, and used punitive measures to raise the test scores for all students. Even though both content and EL teachers differentiated the curriculum to meet the needs of ELs, most students seemed to completely disengage from learning and caused a lot of disruption in the building. Educators throughout the charter school did not receive sufficient support with behavior and the majority of them were unable to build rapport with their pupils. Moreover, the curriculum was not selected based on best practices creating a divide between students and teachers.

Although pre-service teachers receive training in classroom management, diversity, and inclusion, it seems that there is an urgent need to address the discrepancy between the need to raise standardized test scores and the lack of focus on social-emotional development for the whole child. As a new teacher, I experienced a lack of support as well. I relied heavily on my

own research skills to modify the curriculum in a way that best serves the needs of the student population of my classroom. I discovered that creating a learning environment in which students feel respected, supported and encouraged to learn, and where the teaching material is relevant and engaging can bring long-term changes in both students' academic and behavioral outcomes. However, creating such an environment can be challenging as there is not a lot of practical support readily available for educators.

### **Understanding the Factors Influencing Behavior and Learning**

In order to understand the complex behavior of human beings, we need to examine a variety of factors that may contribute to certain behaviors. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), there are five needs that individuals need to satisfy in order to reach their full potential. In order to satisfy each need, the individual must attend to the needs lower in the hierarchy before he or she can attend to the needs higher up. In order to achieve one's full potential, physiological (food, shelter), safety (security, safety), love and belongingness (friendship, love) and esteem needs (dignity, independence) must be at least partially satisfied prior to the progression to the self-actualization stage during which one can seek personal growth and self-fulfillment (Schmutte, 2013).



*Figure 1.*

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

When the reason for a behavior or a lack thereof is an unmet physiological or psychological need, often punitive measures are just temporary fixes to change the behavior. The need to meet the physiological needs of school-aged children has been recognized and there are federal programs available to support low-income families. For instance, the Free and Reduced Price School Meals and free housing programs are available for low-income students nationally. However, a number of students may still struggle to meet their basic needs when school is not in session and they may also experience stress in case they live in high poverty neighborhoods where crime often occurs.

Moreover, the unique population of ELs may also experience a shift, at least temporarily, in meeting their psychological needs once they arrive to the US. Since immigrants leave their support system and community behind, they may also find themselves without a familiar

supportive environment. As a result, ELs experience loss and may not feel like part of a community in their new residence. Consequently, their psychological needs suffer and they may not be able to satisfy their need for love and belonging. In addition, ELs' self-esteem (esteem needs) may also be affected as they struggle to fully decipher a new country's customs, language, and structure.

Educators in the U.S. public school system can serve as a medium to provide a multitude of supports for ELs. The focus of this paper is to address ELs' sense of belonging and esteem needs in the second language classroom since schools are ideal places to motivate young students to succeed academically (esteem needs) and to build friendships with their peers (belonging and love needs). EL teachers can greatly contribute to creating a learning environment in which ELs feel welcome and motivated to learn. In order to address ELs' physiological needs in the classroom, the aim of this paper is to arm the EL teacher with a plethora of resources published on a website that can be utilized to create a learning environment in which ELs can thrive by addressing their social-emotional needs.

### **Research Motives**

In this paper, I will explore ways in which EL teachers can promote a learning environment where ELs in grades 5-12 feel respected and motivated. Specifically, I will aid in targeting social-emotional development to increase ELs' engagement in second language learning. My hope is that EL teachers will utilize the resources on the website to create a curriculum that best serves the social-emotional needs of secondary ELs.

## Chapter Summary

Chapter one introduces my research question: *How can ESL educators design a program that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs?* and establishes the purpose of the study. In chapter two, I present the existing research on social-emotional development in ELs, identity, motivation, and culturally responsive pedagogy. In chapter three, I will describe the website project that aims to provide resources for educators to promote social-emotional development in English learner. In chapter four, I will present my reflection and conclusion as well as theories relevant to my research topic that is worth further investigation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Chapter one described my professional experiences as an EL teacher, which inspired me to research whether programs designed for ELs placing the focus back on social-emotional learning affect students' academic and behavioral outcomes. In chapter two, I will review the literature to support my research question: *How can EL teachers design a program that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs?* This literature review covers the following main themes: (1) social-emotional learning, (2) identity & investment in second language learning, (3) and culturally responsive pedagogy. The first topic is an overview of social-emotional learning, while the second and third will address the unique social-emotional needs of ELs and culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Social-emotional learning, the first theme addressed in this chapter, is the central focus of the capstone project. Social-emotional learning is the process by which an individual integrates thinking, feeling and behavior to attain personal and group goals while actively interacting with members of a social group (Combs, 2003). This is a skill that is essential to master in order to achieve one's full potential within society. Research in social-emotional learning may help to develop instruction that enables students to manage their own emotions, to form constructive relationships within a community and lead to improved learning outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill & Abbott, 2008; Ross & Tolan, 2018; Yeager, 2017). Since social-emotional learning is linked to improved academic and behavioral outcomes, EL teachers should incorporate social-emotional learning



into their curriculum. The first part of this section will provide an overview of social-emotional learning. The second part of the section will offer practical ideas for creating a learning environment where social-emotional development is well-integrated into the curriculum and pedagogy of the instructor.

The second topic addressed in this chapter is identity and investment in learning a second language. Research into identity and investment in learning a second language aims to look at how one's social disposition can affect one's language learning outcomes. Research prior to the 1980s hypothesized that identities of language learners such as motivation and learning styles are static (Norton & Toohey, 2011). However, more recent studies pointed out that motivation, personalities and learning styles are not fixed, and they very much depend on the context in which the learner finds themselves in (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Historically, identity and investment have not been considered as important factors that can affect language acquisition. However, learning takes place in social-settings; therefore, it is essential that EL teachers will take into consideration social factors that might affect language learning outcomes. The first part of this section will provide an overview of identity and investment in language learning and debunk some of the previous theories proposed on motivation. The second part of this section will focus on providing a practical guide for creating an inclusive, safe learning environment where second language learners can engage in learning with confidence.

The third theme addressed in this chapter is culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach that takes into consideration the students' unique cultural heritage to promote the student's sense of well-being about the student's cultural disposition within a society (Sharma & Christ, 2017). Since ELs are a linguistically, culturally

and racially diverse group of students, EL teachers should embrace a culturally responsive pedagogy through planning and delivering instruction. The first part of this section will provide an overview of the theoretical background, importance, and benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy. The second part of the section will provide a practical guide for educators in modifying the curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of culturally diverse classrooms.

Although there has been extensive research on the importance of social-emotional development, there seems to be a lack of research on how to integrate social-emotional learning standards into the curriculum for dual language learners. Research supports that social-emotional learning has a positive impact on students' academic and behavioral outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill & Abbott, 2008; 2011; Ross & Tolan, 2018; Yeager, 2017). However, due to the lack of research on implementing social-emotional learning into the EL curriculum, I adopted a sociocultural lens through which I will be conducting my research on designing programs that address the social-emotional needs of culturally, linguistically and racially diverse ELs.

As a starting point, I will be relying on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1987) which proposed that cognitive development stems from social interactions between members of a society. Since social interactions take place in cultural settings, the learning process is strongly influenced by sociocultural factors (Woolfolk, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to factor in how social-emotional learning, and other invisible sociocultural factors, such as cultural differences or students' marginal positions, may adversely affect dual language learners when the curriculum and instruction do not reflect the student population. The themes of this capstone, (1) social-emotional learning, (2) identity and investment in second language learning, (3) and

culturally responsive pedagogy, are carefully selected to address the importance of social-emotional development, and how certain sociocultural factors might affect dual language learners academic and behavioral outcomes, as well as how the pedagogy should be modified in order to address the needs of a culturally, racially and linguistically diverse group of students.

### **Social-Emotional Learning**

The central theme of this literature review is social-emotional learning. This section's aim is to answer the following questions by reviewing the literature on the topic: What is social-emotional learning? Why is social-emotional learning important? Does it affect students' academic and behavioral outcomes? How can educators address the social-emotional needs of secondary ELs?

### ***Social-Emotional Development in Adolescents***

It is well-known that early childhood is a sensitive period when the human brain rapidly grows as new neurons form. During early childhood, children are developing social and emotional skills among other skills. As part of early childhood development, children learn to understand the feelings of others, control their own behavior and build friendships with other children and adults (Halle et al., 2014). Adolescence, which is the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood, is argued to be another sensitive period, or second window of opportunity, to improve skill sets in the social-emotional domain. During this time, adolescents, or students typically between ages 13 and 19, experience strong emotions, explore their identities and experience rapid changes in behavior (The Science of Adolescent Risk-Taking: Workshop Report, 2011).

During this time, the brain structure of adolescents undergoes significant changes which result in various psychosocial changes due to the onset of puberty. Not surprisingly, problems with behavior can develop or exacerbate as a result. Professionals working with adolescents often try to eliminate problematic behavior by utilizing punitive school-discipline policies such as suspension or expulsion. However, the effect of such policies is usually counterproductive and can drive students toward criminal behavior. This is often referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline (Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016). Instead of utilizing these punitive measures, adolescence is an ideal time to improve the social-emotional domain which can reduce undesirable behaviors.

### ***A Second Window of Opportunity***

Due to various hormonal changes that alter the brain structure, students are biologically predisposed to improve their skill sets in the social-emotional domain. Students with strong social-emotional skills experience a multitude of benefits in both their personal and academic lives. For instance, students with strong social-emotional skills tend to form constructive relationships and can deal with problematic situations in a healthy manner. They often see the world as safe and predictable. They are also more resilient and are more likely to work through difficulties as they are able to recognize and manage their own emotions (Dresser, 2012; Yeager, 2017).

Moreover, there are many health benefits to having a supportive network of friends and family. For example, adolescents who have strong supportive family members and who can effectively deal with problems are not as likely to experience adverse health outcomes later in life as students who were lacking in that domain. Even childhood poverty is not an indicator of

adverse health outcomes later in life as long as the student develops a resilient mindset and has social support during the time of adolescence. Students with strong social networks are less likely to experience poor health outcomes despite their economic status (Meanne, Miller, & Chen, 2016).

### ***Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs***

Social-Emotional Learning or SEL programs are specifically designed to improve students' skill sets in the social-emotional domains. There are various SEL programs available that target students' social and emotional learning both at the elementary and secondary level. Their overarching aim is to improve students' academic and behavioral outcomes by promoting self-awareness of one's own emotions, fostering respect for others and teaching responsible decision making. By mastering essential social-emotional skills, students learn to deal with the pressure of school expectations and form constructive relationships with others.

### ***Grounding Research***

The evidence points to the fact that programs targeting social-emotional learning can improve both students' academic and their behavioral outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill & Abbott, 2008; Ross & Tolan, 2018; Yeager, 2017). For instance, a study of 270,034 students in grades K-12 showed those who participated in the SEL intervention program achieved an average increase of 11 percentile points on standardized test scores (Durlak, 2011). Moreover, a validity analysis showed that SEL programs can positively influence students' behavioral outcomes. It cut down on undesirable behavior such as delinquency, depressive or risky behavior, and improved school engagement

and grades. These studies support that social-emotional learning can positively influence students' achievements and behaviors (Ross & Tolan, 2018).

Moreover, brain research has shown that the affective and cognitive aspects of learning are intertwined (Dresser, 2012; Souse, 1998; Sylwester, 2006). Thus, emotions about school and oneself have a significant effect on learning outcomes. Students who are content, socially-accepted and confident tend to attend school on a regular basis and perform better academically (Bush, Ladd, & Herald, 2001; Dresser, 2012). Since the affective and cognitive aspects of learning are connected, it is not surprising that students who have strong social-emotional skill sets tend to have better academic and behavioral outcomes.

Most of the research that found a positive correlation between improving students' mindset and advanced behavior and academics focused on the overall population of students. However, there seems to be a lack of research conducted on the issue focusing on ELs only. One study that was conducted on 102 Spanish-speaking Latino middle and high school ELs found that the targeted group of Latino ELs gained valuable knowledge on social-emotional learning and they also improved their social-emotional domains (Castro-Olivo, 2012). Since ELs have different needs compared to their native English-speaking peers, there seems to be a need to conduct research on social-emotional learning for multilingual learners. Nevertheless, improving skills in the social-emotional domains is an invaluable method that positively affects behavioral and academic outcomes for both ELs and their native English-speaking peers.

### ***Effective SEL Programs for Adolescents***

The need to develop the skill sets in the social-emotional domain of both elementary and secondary students has been nationally recognized. SEL programs aim to help students to deal

with the pressure of various demands, their own emotions, and their social lives. Students younger than grade eight can benefit from direct instruction in dealing with various situations. For instance, younger students can be explicitly told that smoking is harmful to one's health. However, students older than grade eight may find it condescending to listen to information that they already know (Yeager, 2017).

Research has shown SEL programs that aim to improve the climate of the school are more effective than skill-based training on social-emotional content. For instance, SEL programs that aimed to reduce teen pregnancy rates by only educating youth about safe sex were ineffective. However, programs that aimed to develop students' self-esteem and focused on developing social skills while also delivering content on teen pregnancy not only reduced the number of teen pregnancy rates, but it also improved students' behavior and grades. Similar findings of SEL programs that targeted smoking and youth violence concluded that skill-based programs that only educated adolescents about the harmful effects of smoking and the consequences of violence have little to no effect on reducing the rates of both (Yeager, 2017).

Programs that effectively target social-emotional learning are the ones that make adolescents feel respected by their teachers and peers by improving students' skills and mindsets and by improving the school's climate (Yeager, 2017). In order to create such a school climate, there are four psychological needs that SEL programs must address, the adolescent's need: (1) to stand out, (2) to fit in, (3) to measure up and (4) to make commitments to particular goals (The Science of Adolescent Risk-Taking: Workshop Report, 2011). When SEL programs honor students' desire to achieve the above-mentioned goals, that is when the behavior changes.

### ***Integrating Social-Emotional Learning into the Curriculum***

Based on a growing body of research, improving adolescents' mindset and the school climate is more effective than skill-based training on social-emotional content. Effective SEL programs address adolescents' psychological needs that ultimately improve their behavioral and academic outcomes (Dresser, 2012; Ross & Tolan, 2018; Yeager, 2017). Dresser (2012) argued that social-emotional learning programs should not just be additional lessons, such as after-school programs, but it should be integrated into the curriculum.

Programs specifically designed for ELs should address ELs' unique social-emotional needs as well as increase students' English language and content proficiency while maintaining ELs' self-esteem (Dresser, 2012). Classrooms are ideal places where instruction can address the following four psychological needs of adolescents: (1) the need to stand out, (2) to fit in, (3) to measure up and (4) to make commitments to particular goals (The Science of Adolescent Risk-Taking: Workshop Report, 2011). EL teachers can aim to create a stimulating learning environment by keeping ELs' affective filters low, by having developmentally appropriate expectations, by providing texts with social-emotional content and offering choices.

**Affective Filter.** Adolescents have the psychological need to fit in at their learning environment and to be accepted by their peers. English Learners move to the United States with varying degrees of language proficiency. They often experience stress and embarrassment as a result of their lack of fluency in English. Educators should strive to create a non-threatening, safe environment for ELs. For instance, some students might be nervous to read in front of their classmates as they may not have the fluency to properly pronounce English words. Choral



reading, which is reading aloud in groups, might be a better option for ELs who experience stress as a result of reading in front of their peers (Dresser, 2012).

English learner often have different needs than their native-speaking peers. In an article, Dresser (2012) draws attention to ELs' self-esteem needs. Many of them experience stress when they are asked to read aloud in front of their peers as they may struggle with pronunciation (Dresser, 2012). According to the affective filter hypothesis, negative emotions, such as anxiety or boredom, may filter out the language input (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Studies showed that ELs are reluctant to speak in front of their peers due to the fear of being ridiculed (Norton & Toohey, 2011). When designing classroom activities, it is essential to keep the emotional well-being of ELs in mind by keeping their affective filters low (Dresser, 2012).

**Developmentally Appropriate Expectations.** Research has shown that the solution to improve students' behavior is not to lower but to keep academic expectations high. Since a physiological need of adolescents is to measure up, EL teachers should aim to create an academically challenging learning environment. When educators experience behavioral problems in the classroom, it can be tempting to lower academic expectations. However, behavioral problems can be reduced when the school climate is fair, and adults are supportive of students' goals and struggles. In addition, students are better equipped to handle their emotions when the school environment is more respectful towards them (Yeager, 2017).

Since English Learners are not yet fully proficient in English, it can be tempting to lower the academic expectations for these learners. A case study based on interviews with elementary EL teachers revealed that the teachers' pedagogy was deficit-oriented towards refugees and ELs (Cho, Wang & Christ, 2019). ELs were often given different tasks such as working alone

familiarizing themselves with letters, while their peers were working on more complex tasks. It is important to remember that ELs have the same cognitive abilities as non-ELs, thus they can work on the same classroom activities as their peers with support in the language domain. Supports such as word banks, sentence starters, graphic organizers can aid ELs to decipher the academic language needed to accomplish the desired tasks and to produce the language output needed to demonstrate their knowledge (González-Howard, McNeill, Marco-Bujosa, & Proctor, 2017; Nguyen & Watanabe, 2013) .

**Text with Social-Emotional Content.** Another technique to aid learners in developing strong skill sets in the social-emotional domain is providing texts with social-emotional content. Choosing reading materials that have social-emotional content can increase engagement in reading and it can effectively target social-emotional learning (Dresser, 2012). Understanding that circumstances and traits are only temporary can help alleviate adolescents' stress. Research shows that teaching the incremental theory of personality, or changing mindset of personality, can build resilience in adolescents (Yeager, 2017). Thus, including reading materials in the curriculum on a selection of social-emotional content can increase student engagement and build resilience in students facing stressful situations.

**Offering Choices.** Another way to cater to the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom is to give students the opportunity to choose from several activities in order to improve students' engagement. Dresser (2012) argued it is essential that ELs have access to a variety of reading materials for their optimal language development. Having access to material, such as magazines, fictional books, and so on, both in print and online, can increase students' engagement in reading. By having access to a variety of materials, ELs can choose to read the

text they are interested in. As previously mentioned, one of the psychosocial needs of adolescents is to make a commitment to a particular goal (Yeager, 2017). Students who have the option to choose from a selection of activities are more likely to pick one that they can commit to.

### ***Summary***

Nationally, there is a growing tendency to integrate social-emotional learning standards into the curriculum. In fact, many states have developed their own social-emotional learning standards for the middle and high school level. What is important to remember is that changing the climate of the school and creating an environment where students feel important and respected by their peers and adults can bring long term changes. Also, ELs have unique needs and negative emotions may keep the language input out (Lightbown & Spada, 2012). Direct instruction in various skills is less effective than aiming to change mindsets of adolescents and the school climate (Yeager, 2017). Integrating social-emotional learning into the curriculum can be an ideal solution in order to improve students' social skills and mindsets (Dresser, 2012).

### **Identity and Investment in Second Language Learning**

The second theme of this literature review is identity and investment in second language learning. This section's aim is to answer the following questions by reviewing the literature on the topic: How does motivation affect second language learning? Do social factors affect motivation, attitudes and language learning? What can EL teachers do to positively affect ELs' self-esteem and feelings about belonging to the community of the target language speaking community? Should the instruction be modified to address the power relation between native and non-native speakers of the target language?

### ***Research prior to 1980***

Research has shown that motivation can positively affect language learning. Students who are motivated actively participate in classroom activities, engage and express interest in learning. EL teachers can increase students' motivation by creating a classroom where the atmosphere is supportive, the content is relevant and engaging, and the goals are challenging but feasible (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). While it is important to strive to create a learning environment where ELs feel motivated, educators are also advised to take into consideration other factors affecting motivation.

In research prior to the 1980s, language learners' motivation and personalities were defined as fixed. Studies conducted on learners' motivation assumed that learners who were unsuccessful at learning a foreign language were not motivated enough. More recent publications began to question whether motivation and personality traits of language learners can fluctuate depending on a variety of factors. More specifically, a number of publications began to examine the effect of social relations between non-native speakers of the target language and native speakers on language learning motivation and attitudes (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

### ***Imagined Communities***

The way social relations between non-native speakers of the target language and native speakers affect the language learning outcomes of learners is a relatively new research field. Bonny Norton and her colleagues conducted several research studies on the topic to explain seemingly paradoxical phenomena concerning second language learning outcomes. Norton developed a sociolinguistic theory, called Imagined Communities, that explains how second

language learners' motivation to learn a target language is affected by the way they relate or are treated by the target language community (Norton, 2001, 2010, 2016; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pacheco, 2014).

Norton (2010) argued that communities, whether tangible or intangible, can be a single determining factor of the language learning outcomes of an individual:

In our daily life, we interact with many communities whose existence can be felt concretely and directly such as our neighborhood communities, our workplaces, our educational institutions, and our religious groups. However, these are not the only communities with which we are affiliated. Imagined ties can extend both spatially and temporally (Anderson, 1991). Thus in imagining themselves bonded with their fellow human beings across space and time, learners can feel a sense of community with people they have not yet met, including future relationships that exist only in a learner's imagination. (Norton, 2010, p. 3)

The theory proposes that the desire to connect with the target language can be so strong, that the second language learner will learn the target language despite the physical distance of the target language community. (Norton, 2001, 2010, 2016; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Hence, the desire to learn English worldwide could be explained with the desire to connect to a community of speakers by this single theory.

Thus, the motivation to learn a second language can be strongly influenced by social factors such as cultural norms, class, regional differences, gender and so on. For instance, the way a language learner views or is viewed by the target language community, whether the language learner positively or negatively relates to the target language community, could

motivate the language learner to seek out opportunities to engage in language learning or vice versa. The language code is a tool that non-native speakers want to utilize in order to connect with a community of speakers (Norton, 2001, 2010, 2016; Norton & Toohey, 2011).

### ***Grounding Research***

In recent years, several studies were conducted to explore how the power relations between native and non-native speakers and other physiological processes affect language learning outcomes. Most of these studies are case studies that investigated individual English Learners' feelings and attitudes towards their English language classes. They also aimed to explain why ELs rejected the EL label, chose to be silent or became unmotivated to attend EL classes.

A Canadian case study conducted by Norton (2001) explored why five highly motivated English learner decided to stop participating in the English language classes. Katarina, one of the participants of the study, dropped out of her language class after she received some harsh criticism from her instructor. Katarina indicated that she was made to feel inadequate in the class and that she suspected that the Canadian instructor had a bias toward immigrants. The situation came to a climax when Katarina's instructor suggested that Katarina's English is just "not good enough". Therefore, she should not take a computer class in English. Katarina rejected the EL label and joined the computer class despite the instructor's advice.

Another participant of the same case study is Mai, a Vietnamese student. Mai's motivation to learn English was to develop a language fluency proficient enough to be hired as an office employee in a Canadian clothing factory. Even though she was highly motivated to attend English language classes, she had little investment in her English class due to the structure

of the class. While Mai was hoping to learn business English allowing her to communicate with future clients, colleagues and supervisors, the English class in question mainly taught her to write about her national heritage and previous immigration experience. Mai wanted to utilize English as a tool to connect with a native speaker community; however, the EL class instruction was not aligned to her goals (Norton, 2001).

Another classroom-based study conducted by Duff (2002) revealed that English learner are highly motivated to participate in classroom dialogues despite their reluctance to speak in front of their peers. In the study, the EL instructors often gave ELs the opportunity to speak; however, ELs often chose to remain silent instead. The study concluded that ELs perceived silence as a way to protect themselves from harsh criticism. In the study, ELs' investment in the native-speaking community was so high that they were too anxious to contribute to the classroom discussion. However, native speakers often interpret ELs' choice to be silent as proof that they are unmotivated, disengaged and that they are not interested in improving their English. Norton argues that ELs are motivated to learn English; however, they reject the language learning environment, and power relations between native speakers and themselves (Norton, 2001, 2016; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pacheco, 2014).

In another case study, Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) described three case studies of immigrants who struggled with being labeled as English Learners. She argued that the terms ESL (English as a Second Language) or ELL (English language learner) are problematic since the terms themselves are too descriptive. The essay explores the way students interpret needing services as a deficit view of themselves wondering when they would be classified as someone who is considered proficient in English. Often, English Learners strive to belong to the native

speaker community; however, they feel marginalized as they are labeled as someone whose English is “not good enough”.

The case study by Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) also revealed the struggle that English Learners experience when adapting to a new culture. One of the participants of the case study was Sergej who moved to the United States from Serbia. He was not fond of his academic writing class and he was only working hard to earn an A to keep his scholarship. His reflection revealed how much he wanted to remain in Croatia, and felt he was taken against his will to live in the United States. He also wished that the instruction was similar to the one in Croatia and he also disliked his teacher for saying certain things such as “thanks for sharing”, which he did not find meaningful. Sergej was successful academically; however, he remained in the English language program for many years. Ultimately, Sergej rejected the native speaker community as he could not relate to it and instead he wished to belong to his native speaker community.

The case studies shed light on how second language learners’ feelings about the target community can positively or negatively affect their language learning outcomes. A target language is a tool that language learners hope to utilize to connect with a community of speakers, thus their willingness, or their opportunity to engage in language learning is the greatest when the language learning atmosphere is optimal. An optimal language learning environment helps ELs to learn the kind of language that is needed to connect with the target language community they aim to join and maintains a positive impression of members of the native-speaking community and is inclusive (Duff, 2002; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Norton, 2001).



### ***Implications***

When newly arrived immigrants have little access to authentic English and when they are cut off from the native-speaking communities, “ESL ghettos” are formed. Immigrants often struggle to gain access to the target language code, if they arrive without any target language proficiency (Pacheco, 2014). Norton invites educators to learn about students’ cultural heritage, identities, and goals in order to increase English Learners’ engagement in language learning. She also suggests that classroom instruction should be inclusive in order to allow non-native speakers of English access to authentic English. ELs should also have the opportunity to connect with native speakers of English as well as they should be encouraged to challenge their marginal positions (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pacheco, 2014).

### ***Summary***

There is a growing body of research on identity and investment in second language learning. English Learners may be highly motivated to learn English; however, negative emotions toward their new identity and community, or the lack of access to authentic English may negatively impact their English language acquisition. EL instructors should strive to be more sensitive towards ELs and should aim to modify the instruction to create a more inclusive learning environment. Also, culturally responsive pedagogy may help to mitigate cultural differences which will be addressed in the following section. Even though there is a growing body of research available on the effect of ELL’s social disposition on their language learning engagement, there is a gap in research on how instructional methods can be modified to address the dissatisfaction created by the unequal power relations.

## **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

The third, and final theme of this literature review is culturally responsive pedagogy. This section's aim is to answer the following questions by reviewing the literature on the topic: What is culturally responsive pedagogy? Why is culturally responsive pedagogy important? Does it affect students' academic outcomes? How can educators incorporate elements of culturally responsive pedagogy into their instruction?

### ***Historical Overview***

Since the 1980s, anthropologists have been researching how home culture affects students' academic outcomes and whether adapting instruction to mimic some of the aspects of students' home culture can improve students' grades. A study conducted by Au and Jordan in 1981 showed that teachers who incorporated story-talk, and interaction style used by Native Hawaiian children, into their lessons were able to raise Native Hawaiian children's test scores on standardized tests (Au & Jordan, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1995). A similar study by Mohatt and Erickson (1981) also concluded that Native American students benefit academically from instruction that mimics students' home cultural patterns.

The term "culturally responsive" was used to describe the interaction style of teaching that approximated Native American students' home culture (Cazden & Laggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982). Jordan (1985) concluded that teachers were able to include certain patterns of students' home culture by observing students' interaction styles in their home environment. The style of teaching does not have to be the same, but including certain elements can help improve minority students' academic achievement and behavior (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Moreover, Macias (1987) concluded that the cultural, racial and linguistic background of the instructor does not need to match the students' background as long as the instructor is culturally competent. A study that was conducted on the children of the Papago Indian tribe found that culturally competent teachers can modify the curriculum and instruction in a way that includes some elements of the students' home culture. Although an instructor with a similar cultural background as the student population is ideal, instructors from various backgrounds can introduce students to the mainstream by modifying the instruction. Also, introducing students to the mainstream this way enables students to maintain their appreciation toward their own cultural heritage (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

### ***The Importance of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy***

Culturally relevant pedagogy can enable minority students to maintain their cultural heritage while succeeding academically (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sharma & Christ, 2017; Wearmouth, 2016). According to Glynn et al. (2006), problems with behavior arise when the instruction and curriculum are primarily different from students' home culture. When the language and cultural background of the students differ significantly from the school's literacy practices, minority children's achievement is hindered. In addition, minority children's cultural capital is dismissed instead of being utilized (Gay, 2010; Wearmouth, 2016).

A study by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) examined how "acting white", or acting racially or culturally different, affects African-American students' academic achievement. The study concluded that African-American students thrive socially when they reject the school system that is culturally and linguistically different from their home culture. In order to impress their peers, these students must reject the school system that is predominantly "white" and be

underachievers. Alarming, the majority of African-American students who succeed academically in grade school are beyond grade level by the time they go to middle school (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Thus, it is crucial to modify instruction to mimic minority students' home culture in order to best serve these students.

There are a variety of instructional methods that educators can utilize in order to create a learning environment that is culturally congruent. What is important to remember is to mimic the students' home culture in order to engage them in the learning progress. For instance, teachers of African-American youth can incorporate the lyrics of rap songs into the lesson plan when introducing poetry. Since rap songs are part of the African-American heritage, black students can relate to poetry via finding similarities in them. Moreover, teachers can utilize peer leaders' influence by encouraging them to be leaders of various student organizations. When popular students are involved with organizations within the school, their peers are more likely to perceive activities associated with the school as appealing (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

As far as English Learners (ELs) are concerned, they are also culturally, linguistically and racially diverse groups of students. Since studies have shown that instructional methods that mimic some aspects of students home culture can enable minority students to succeed academically (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sharma & Christ, 2017; Wearmouth, 2016), it is essential to modify the instruction to mimic ELs' cultural and linguistic heritage (Yoon, 2007). For instance, when the majority of ELs' home culture is rich in oral language interaction, the instruction should mimic that by incorporating more talking time, whether that is pair-share, small group discussion or teacher-led discussion, into the lesson.

### ***Culturally Relevant Texts***

One way to modify the instruction to mimic students' home culture is by selecting culturally relevant texts for classroom instruction. Darling-Hammond (2010) argued that teachers often do not have the resources and skill set to develop instruction that is culturally responsive. Sharma and Christ (2017) developed a practical five steps model toward integrating culturally relevant texts into the curriculum.

The first step is to recognize the need to find culturally relevant texts for culturally diverse classrooms. Nowadays, students' home culture and linguistic background are very diverse and the classroom instruction and instructional materials do not necessarily mimic any of those aspects. Therefore, it is important that educators recognize that a culturally diverse group of students have different instructional needs from culturally homogenous ones and take steps toward choosing culturally relevant texts for instruction.

The second step is to get to know the students in the classroom. This second step is essential since it aids classroom teachers in selecting reading materials that reflect students' home culture. For instance, when selecting a text for a Thanksgiving lesson theme, educators can extend the theme of the lesson by selecting reading materials that address immigration to the United States throughout history. This way, ELs might be able to relate to the text by reading about other immigrants who came to the United States to search for a better life. As students are reading the text, they can make inferences or connections to their own lives which aid comprehension (Sharma & Christ, 2017).

There are several ways to get to know one's students in the classroom. For example, teachers can ask students to create a personal story project to share some facts about their

cultural heritage or their journey to America. Students can use apps such as iMovie, Little Bird Tales, Explain Everything or Doodle Cast Pro. They can also use an All About Me board either digitally or in print, which is a table with nine cells asking students to describe their family, home, favorite place, books, music, movies & games, dreams and the most important things they do each week. Another way to get to know students in a classroom is by asking them to find text that they feel they can relate to. The instructor can use the collected information to aid her in selecting culturally relevant texts as part of the instructional material (Sharma & Christ, 2017).

The third step is to search for culturally relevant texts. This process is challenging since there are not many culturally relevant textbooks available in today's classrooms. Most of the educational publishers select books mostly with white or animal characters. What is more, only 18 of 171 text recommended by Common Core Standards are written by non-white authors (Gangi, as cited in Sharma & Christ, 2017). However, there are many other excellent book lists available, Tomas Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award, or the Coretta Scott King Book Award, that can guide educators in selecting culturally relevant texts (Sharma & Chris, 2017).

The fourth step is to select culturally relevant text for instruction. Sharma and Christ (2017) recommend using a rubric to make sure that the selection is appropriate to make sure that the selected text is culturally relevant. The final step is to identify critical and personal response opportunities for instruction. During this stage, the instructor asks critical questions that require higher order thinking about connecting students' own life experiences to the ones in the text. The above-mentioned five steps by Sharma and Christ is a practical guide aiding teaching in selecting culturally relevant texts.

### ***Sources with Culturally Relevant Materials***

Moreover, there are some culturally relevant materials available in multiple languages that would be an excellent resource for ELs. For instance, African Storybook (<https://africanstorybook.org/>) is an excellent free online resource that contains a large number of reading materials published both in English and in other languages. The website features hundreds of African fairy tales, folktales and so on, that are culturally relevant for immigrant students from countries such as Somalia or Kenya or other countries in Africa as they are familiar with these stories (Stranger-Johannessen & Norton, 2017). In addition, students can access stories in their home languages such as Somali or Swahili. Also, Kids A-Z is an online resource for students in K-6 with differentiated lessons to reading levels and English proficiency levels (Learning A-Z, 2019). Students can select reading materials in both English and in languages such as Polish, Spanish, French, Ukrainian, Vietnamese and British English.

### ***Summary***

Although research has shown that culturally responsive pedagogy can positively affect students' academic outcomes, curriculum and instruction still need to adapt to the changing needs of today's culturally diverse classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sharma & Christ, 2017). For instance, instruction should mimic some aspects of students' home culture. In addition, selecting culturally relevant text is another way to connect students' previous experiences that aids in comprehension. There are some resources available, such as websites and booklists, that specialize in publishing culturally-relevant texts. However, curriculum and instruction must be modified by the EL and content teachers in order to reflect the home culture of the student population.

## Chapter Summary

Chapter two reviewed the literature on the topics of social-emotional learning, identity & investment in second language learning and culturally-responsive pedagogy to support the research question: *How can EL teachers design a program that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs?* Chapter three will provide a description of the capstone project, which is a website with a collection of best practices and resources to target secondary ELs language development with a special focus on social-emotional development.



## CHAPTER THREE

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### Introduction

The research question of this capstone is, *how can EL teachers design a program that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs?* Based on my findings, my goal is to create a website with a plethora of resources tailored to support the social-emotional needs of ELs. The website is a tool that aims to help secondary EL teachers with instructional design to create an academic environment that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs. By creating a balanced learning environment where ELs feel understood and inspired, I am aiming to increase ELs' engagement in second language learning.

In chapter one, I described my professional experience as an EL teacher, which inspired me to research EL program designs that best serve the social-emotional needs of secondary ELs. In chapter two, I reviewed the literature available on social-emotional development, identity & investment in second language learning and culturally relevant pedagogy to support my research question. The research taught me that having strong social-emotional skills directly affect students' academic and social outcomes. Also, social-emotional learning should not be just an extra lesson, but it should be integrated into the curriculum.

This website will be a convenient tool for secondary EL teachers to access valuable resources to design programs suited for the social-emotional needs of ELs. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of my website, the intended audience and the website design framework that I will be utilizing in order to create a high-quality webpage. I will also share my rationale for

choosing to create a website with resources instead of curriculum design or professional development. Finally, I will provide a timeline in which I will complete the project.

### **Project Overview**

I will be developing a website for secondary EL teachers to provide valuable resources on creating a learning environment that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs. Resources, tips, and various articles will be shared in the following four domains: culturally-responsive teaching, social-emotional content, support for ELs, and keeping the affective filter low. Links to access a collection of culturally-relevant texts and text with social-emotional content, downloadable supports to modify mainstream instruction, and classroom activities will be available on the website. In addition, EL teachers will have access to various articles in the above-mentioned categories as well.

### **Rationale**

Nowadays, teachers in the United States have more and more responsibility to work with students, parents, and administrators. Even though EL teachers receive training in diversity and classroom management, it still can be a challenge to engage ELs during class time. I wanted to provide a simple tool that EL teachers can easily access from home or school with valuable resources to create lesson plans that will support the social-emotional needs of ELs. Also, new EL teachers are often asked to create lesson plans without much support. Therefore, a website with instructional methods, best practices and resources might be helpful. My choice to create a website, instead of a curriculum or professional development, was to provide a tool that is accessible at all times and that could help across a multitude of subject areas.

## **Project Framework**

In order to construct a high-quality website, I will be utilizing a website design framework created by Hasan and Abuelrub (2010). The majority of this work is also echoed in research-based web design and usability guidelines published by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2006), which promotes a strong web design. The research-based framework by Hasan and Abuelrub (2010) provides an easy-to-follow guide that helps developers in website design. The dimensions of the evaluation criteria are the following: content, design, organization and user-friendly quality.

### ***Content Quality***

The first dimension of evaluation criteria proposed by Hasan and Abuelrub (2010) is website content. A high-quality website presents information with accuracy and is free from spelling and grammar errors. Also, a website with high-quality content provides information without bias, is properly referenced and lists the contact information of the publisher. Moreover, a website should present information in multiple receiving formats such as audio, video or graphics options and in multiple languages.

In regards to my project, I will aim to meet most of the content criteria with the exception of providing translation in multiple languages due to a lack of resources. I will rely on feedback from my peer editors, advisors, content experts, and the Writing Center at Hamline University to ensure that my website content is free from spelling and grammar errors. Moreover, I will also work with the same experts to ensure that bias of my website content is minimized. Additionally, I will also provide a reference list under each article. Last, I will aim to use video, audio and graphics options whenever possible to reach a wide range of users.

### ***Design Quality***

The next dimension of quality proposed by Hasan and Abuelrub (2010) is a high-quality design. Hasan and Abuelrub (2010) argued that high-quality design is one of the most important criteria as it determines how much time people will spend on the website. A website with high-quality design presents information in an attractive manner that engages people who visit the webpage. The website should use a light background with readable text. There should be one font size for all text with the exception of the title. Also, there should not be more than 4 colors of text per each webpage. The website should display text, pictures, and animation to make the website attractive and engaging for its visitors.

My goal is to meet all of the criteria proposed by Hasan and Abuelrub (2010) to create a website with high-quality design. I will create an attractive website with a light background, contrastive black text color, and pictures. I will also keep the font size consistently 12 on all pages with the exception of the title. Moreover, I will plan to use a variety of pictures and animations by utilizing websites such as [pixabay.com](https://pixabay.com) and [creativecommons.org](https://creativecommons.org) to access their licensed pictures.

### ***Organization Quality***

Another dimension of quality websites is organization (Hasan & Abuelrub, 2010). A website with high-quality organization should be easy to navigate since visitors will be looking for specific information rather than browsing the entire website. To help visitors locate information, the website should have an index on the main page. The index page shows various categories available on the website that help the visitors locate what they are looking for. Also,

the index page should have proper links that redirect visitors to the proper page. Lastly, each web page should have a logo or a sign associated with the website or organization.

My plan is to meet all of the criteria proposed by Hasan and Abuelrub (2010) to create a website with high-quality organization. I will organize the content available on the website into four main categories. Visitors can access each main category of my website from the main page, and I will include an index to help users navigate the website on the main page as well. Also, I will double check each link to make sure that they are working properly. In addition, I will be utilizing a free logo-making app, such as the app available on [graphicsprings.com](https://www.graphicsprings.com), to create an attractive logo displayed on each page.

### ***User-Friendly Criteria***

The last dimension of website quality described by Hasan and Abuelrub (2010) is user-friendliness. A user-friendly website has short loading times, displays few or no ads and works properly in multiple browsers. Also, a website should include a section on frequently asked questions or an internal search tool to help users locate information on the webpage. To meet the criteria, my plan is to create a website with no ads, that will also include an internal search button to easily find information on the website.

### **Audience**

The website is primarily designed for secondary EL teachers within the United States to aid in designing classroom instruction that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs. However, content and elementary EL teachers might find certain resources available on webpage valuable as well. In my opinion, the type of secondary school or location within the United States does not affect how well the resources available on the website could be utilized.

## **Project Timeline**

The website development will take place from January 2020 to May 2020. During this time frame, I will be working on writing articles and sharing resources in the following four main categories: culturally-responsive teaching, social-emotional content, differentiation and the affective filter. My plan is to use Wordpress as a website platform and dedicate a month to write articles, create and upload resources in each category.

## **Project Platform**

Nowadays, there is a good selection of online website builder services available. These programs make it a breeze to design a website as there is almost no need to understand how to code HTML. After researching the website builders, I selected Wordpress as it has a number of professional templates and it also provides online help for beginner website designers.

## **Assessment**

As for assessment, I will be creating an online survey to get feedback on the project. I will also look at the data generated of daily visitors generated by Wordpress, the website platform I selected, to determine how successful the website is in terms of reaching the target audience. Looking at both data will give me an idea of the number of daily visitors and how satisfied visitors are with the website.

## **Summary**

The research question of this capstone is the following: *How can EL teachers design a program that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs?* In this chapter, I provided an overview of the project and I described the website design framework that I will be using to ensure the quality of the website. I also described my intended audience, project timeline and my

rationale for choosing to create a website for this project. In chapter four, I will reflect on my experience designing this project.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

The central question of this capstone is, *how can EL teachers design a program that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs?* In chapters one and two, I described my professional experience as an EL teacher, and I studied the literature available on social-emotional development, identity and investment in second language learning and culturally relevant pedagogy. In chapter three, I reviewed the process I used to create a website that advises teachers on supporting the social-emotional needs of English Learners.

In this chapter, I will share my final thoughts on creating this project to advise teachers on creating EL programs that best serve the social-emotional needs of ELs. I will also revisit my literature review to reflect on what I have learned from researching the available literature on the social-emotional development for ELs. Also, I will discuss how my research could inform policy to rethink the EL program design. Finally, I will share the limitations of my project and suggest areas of research to explore in the future and potential website improvements.

#### My Takeaways

As a first-year teacher, I struggled with classroom management in terms of engagement and behavior. In the school where I taught, students often instigated fights, made derogatory comments, and seemed to lack compassion for others. This experience inspired me to research how a modified curriculum and instruction can positively impact students' social-emotional



stance. In this section, I will present my reflection and conclusion regarding my literature review and project development.

### ***Literature Review***

When I began the process of writing this capstone, I first formulated my research question, *how can EL teachers design a program that best serves the social-emotional needs of EL?* Initially, I was hoping to find research articles on programs that address the social-emotional needs of English Learners. I found an abundance of research articles on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs; however, there were only a handful of publications on social-emotional learning specifically targeting English Learners.

Most findings reiterated that SEL programs that aim to improve the climate of the school are more effective than skill-based training on social-emotional content. The article *Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents* written by Yeager (2017) was very influential at the early stages of my work as it refutes the need for skill-based training and highlights the need to improve the school climate. During the first phase of the research, I learned that explicitly teaching social-emotional skills, such as ‘let us be kind to each other,’ will not work for adolescents. The pedagogy of the instructor is the key to improve students’ skill sets in the social-emotional domain.

During the second phase of my research, I began to explore articles on social-emotional learning for ELs. There is a research gap in social-emotional development for ELs; thus, I expanded my research to also explore sociocultural factors affecting learning for a culturally and linguistically diverse group of students. The themes of this capstone reflect my thinking process. First, I reviewed (1) social-emotional learning, which is the first theme of my capstone. Then, I

added (2) identity and investment in second language learning, (3) and culturally responsive pedagogy as topics to address how certain sociocultural factors affect learning and behavior.

### ***Project Development***

Once I conducted the research, it was time to scope a platform to share my findings. This was one of the most challenging parts of the project as I wrote several academic papers, but I had never designed a project. I decided that a website, which is always accessible and global, would be a great medium to provide much-needed resources for secondary EL teachers. I chose Wordpress as a platform as it was easy to navigate and create for a beginner web developer.

The website I built has an attractive design and looks professional. I distributed the resources under four main categories: culturally relevant pedagogy, social-emotional content, the affective filter, and differentiation. These categories are also the four pillars of developing the social-emotional domains in adolescent ELs of the framework I created. There is also a surplus category, “Others” on the website, where I listed a short “Q & A” and listed my references.

On one hand, I appreciate the fact that I was able to share what had worked for me as an EL teacher to support fellow teachers. On the other hand, I underestimated the time I needed to create a website with such a wide range of resources, especially with no previous website design experience. A project of this volume requires a team effort or at least more time to develop. In hindsight, I should have created a project focusing on communicating the framework I designed rather than the platform to share the content.

## **Major Learnings**

In the previous section, I presented my reflection and conclusion regarding my literature review and project development. In this section, I will reflect on what I have learned as a scholar while creating my capstone.

### ***Research Skill***

As a researcher, I have broadened my knowledge on conducting research when there is a research gap. Before writing this capstone, I did not know how to bridge a research gap, and I tended to change directions if there was not enough research supporting my thesis statement. This capstone writing experience taught me to appreciate research gaps as they offer a unique opportunity to add something new to the field. To bridge a research gap, I learned that it is possible to use theories from other areas of research. In the case of my capstone, there was a research gap in social-emotional learning of ELs. To address this gap, I merged theories concerning second language learning and culturally relevant pedagogy to answer my research question on creating learning programs that best serve the social-emotional needs of ELs.

### ***Creating Research-Based Projects***

Prior to writing this capstone, I had no experience in creating research-based projects. This experience taught me how to develop research-based projects as it builds the foundations of creating such works. To develop a research-based project, I learned that I needed to review the literature on my topic before moving onto designing the project. It is also essential to plan out the details such as the projected time frame, audience, and project framework, etc. before beginning the work on the actual project. In the case of this project, I first researched the available literature on SEL programs for ELs. Then, I decided on a website project which aids teachers in creating

EL programs that best serve the social-emotional needs of ELs. Finally, I did all the planning, such as selecting Hasan & Abuelrub's (2010) website designing guide as a project framework and the project platform. The last step was to create the website. This experience taught me to appreciate research-based projects, and in case I want to create a similar project, I will be able to rely on the same process as I used to create this capstone project.

### **Benefits to Profession**

In the previous section, I reflected on what I have learned as a scholar while creating this capstone. In this section, I will discuss the implications of my work, the benefits my project can bring to the profession, how my work could be further expanded, and certain limitations of my project.

### ***Implications***

**Safety.** As an educator, I am alarmed by some of the aggressive behavior I witnessed in various public schools in the USA. The safety and security of students and teachers should come first; however, that is not always the case. The first step toward quality education should be ensuring that students and teachers can be present at school sites without safety issues. While having the police presence at schools may be a sufficient temporary solution, we need to examine the root cause of these behavioral problems, so that steps can be taken towards eliminating this serious issue.

**Integrated Social-Emotional Content.** One way to eliminate undesirable behaviors is by improving students' skill sets in the social-emotional domain. As Dresser (2012) pointed out, it is not enough to have "extra" social-emotional lessons, rather the social-emotional content should be integrated into the curriculum. Nowadays, many school districts recognize the need to

address the school climate, and some states even created their own social-emotional standards; however, the challenging part is to integrate social-emotional learning standards into the curriculum, which brings me to my next point.

**Policy Implications Regarding EL Programs.** My work is unique in a sense as it brings a large body of both research on social-emotional development and theories concerning ELs under one hat, and it integrates social-emotional learning into the EL curriculum. It also highlights the need to effectively integrate ELs, emphasizes the need for social-emotional learning standards for ELs, and de-emphasizes the need for early testing of ELs prior to achieving English academic proficiency.

**Further Research.** There are multiple research gaps regarding social-emotional learning for ELs. As mentioned previously, there is a large body of research on social-emotional learning (SEL) programs for the general student population; however, I was able to find only a limited number that measured the success rate of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs targeting ELs. Although multiple research articles pointed out the need to integrate social-emotional learning into the curriculum, there was only a handful with practical tips on integrating some social-emotional learning into the EL curriculum.

### ***Limitations***

In the previous section, I described how the website benefits the profession. In this section, I will discuss certain aspects of my project that could be improved and share the limitations of my project.

**Website Content.** As mentioned previously, I underestimated the time I needed to complete this project. Initially, I intended to design a logo, add downloadable resources, and

have more articles under each category. There was some additional work, such as editing chapter 1-3, that took longer than I had anticipated. Therefore, I had less time to work on the website than I had originally planned. I had approximately 3 months to create this project. During this time, I created the virtual platform and published 11 articles and one Q &A, but the resources I am providing on the website are limited.

**Website Design.** The website presents information in a professional manner, but it lacks certain features. Hasan and Abuelrub (2010) argued that high-quality design is one of the most important criteria as it determines how much time people will spend on the website. While my website is readable, as it contrasts a dark font with light background color, an improvement would be adding more animations, pictures and audio to reach a broader audience.

**Framework.** As I was conducting my research, I realized that there is a research gap in the area of social-emotional learning for ELs. Therefore, I reviewed the existing literature on social-emotional learning for the general student population and combined research on socio-cultural factors affecting language acquisition and minorities to create a framework addressing the social-emotional needs of adolescent ELs. Although components of my framework, such as culturally relevant pedagogy or differentiation, are recognized, my findings to address the social-emotional needs of specifically ELs are preliminary, and further research should be conducted to evaluate its effectiveness.

## **Conclusion**

The research question of this capstone is, *how can EL teachers design a program that best serves the social-emotional needs of ELs?* After conducting my research, I created a website

that helps EL teachers design a program targeting social-emotional needs to develop more effectively reach ELs.

In this final chapter, I shared my final thoughts on creating this project to advise teachers on creating EL programs that best serve the social-emotional needs of ELs. I also revisited my literature review to reflect on what I have learned from researching the available literature on the social-emotional development of EL and how my research could inform policy. My hope is that this project helps EL teachers struggling with behavioral management and student engagement to see progress in improving the effectiveness of EL programs via promoting social-emotional growth.

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